

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXV—No. 19

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

In an interview given not long ago in Rome, Cardinal Bea, SJ, of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (founded by the late Pope John), assured a visiting Anglican cleric that, "the Counter-Reformation is now definitely finished". More generally, that specific era in the evolution of Catholicism which began when the Reformation forced Rome back on the defensive has now come to an end, to be succeeded presumably by an era of Christian reunion. The Second Vatican Council will doubtless play the same sort of role in relation to ecumenism as the Council of Trent played in the initiation of the Counter-Reformation in the mid-16th century.

It is nowadays generally admitted, not only by critical scholars but by most Roman Catholic scholars themselves, that the Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther in 1517, constitutes, as it were, a deep water-shed that historically, sharply sunders the medieval Church from the Catholicism of modern (post-Reformation) times. For what, in effect, the Protestant revolution—and it was a revolution in the current context of its own era—did, was to force the Church of Rome back on to the defensive. Thenceforth, the "Universal" Church had to resign itself to being no longer universal, something to be simply taken for granted, as it had been in the Middle Ages, but was continually forced to justify itself against Protestant, and in time, rationalist critiques.

The Jesuits

From the Council of Trent—or perhaps more accurately, from the inception of the Jesuits (1540), right down to the present Vatican Council, a period of about four centuries, the prevailing type of Catholicism has been (as I once defined it elsewhere) "the Catholicism of a state of siege". Modern Catholicism has been increasingly centralised under an ultramontane papal autocracy that received its official stamp by the declaration of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1870. A leading part—often indeed the leading part—in this ecclesiastical counter-revolution was played through this post-Tridentine era by the militarily organised Society of Jesus, the Praetorian Guard or, to employ a more modern analogy, the SS men of the modern Church of Rome. Throughout this whole era, the Church was organised on primarily defensive lines in order to meet the Protestant attack initiated by Luther, Calvin, *et al.*

The New Counter-Reformation

Such were the primary characteristics of the Counter-Reformation (perhaps counter-revolution would be the more precise term since its cultural, and even political aspects far transcended the purely religious sphere) that may be said to have lasted right down to the inception of Pope John's "papal revolution" and its resulting ecumenical movement. Now we apparently have the assurance of Pope John's right-hand man (and a Jesuit!), Cardinal Bea, that this long era is over.

What precisely, does the Cardinal mean? We suggest that, as another former dignitary of Holy Church (Talley-

rand) once suggested, "Words were made to conceal thought". For what his Jesuitical Eminence seemed really to have meant was, not that the old Counter-Reformation was finished, but that a *new* one has now begun; a contemporary counter-revolution no longer (as in the 16th century) primarily directed against Protestantism—now "our separated brethren"—but against the scientific revolution of the 20th century, and against atheism, its philosophical culmination.

This new Counter-Reformation will need an entirely new strategic approach, an approach which, as Pope John and Cardinal Bea realised, will require both different methods and different allies from those which passed

muster in the days of the Inquisition and of St. Ignatius Loyola. For it is no longer a mere internal theological controversy between Catholic and non-Roman interpretations of Christianity, but a final back-to-the-wall stand of all the Churches—and in time perhaps, all the gods—against the common menace of atheism, which threatens them all with universal extinction. Obviously a radical revision of earlier tactics is needed; for to present such a united front against atheism, allies must be sought—and found! Hence the ecumenical movement and the unprecedented official recognition of atheism as a serious subject for study, and no longer as always formerly in Catholic theology, a mere lunatic aberration. Today, in fact, Rome in her "infallible" wisdom makes her own the wordly-wise epigram of that Protestant cynic, Lord Melbourne: "For God's sake gentlemen, let us all hang together, since otherwise we shall all hang separately".

This (in quite non-ecclesiastical language) represents the advice now shouted by Rome from the housetops to "our separated brethren" the non-Roman Churches—and in time no doubt to the—shall we say?—separated gods of the non-Christian cults. The universal Church is at present seeking to put herself at the head of a universal "Counter-Reformation".

Rome's Last Stand

Critical writers (including the present one) are sometimes accused of overestimating the strength of what is undoubtedly today, the major enemy of all forms of humanism, the Church of Rome. One should not of course do this any more than Rome herself does. For actions speak louder than words and it is today quite evident from their actions (even more than from their words), that Cardinal Bea and the backroom boys of the Vatican who really run the Church behind the facade of papal infallibility, have no illusions about their situation, which is grimmer and more critical than were any of the numerous crises that have so often occurred in the chequered and stormy annals of the Church of Rome: far more so even than was the Reformation itself. For Rome and religion today, fight for their very lives. Rome now falls back on her "Maginot Line", her *ne plus ultra*. Her new Counter-Reformation must be her last, for the Vatican has no further reserves to draw on!

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The New Counter-Reformation

By F. A. RIDLEY

The SPR and Sir William Crookes

By H. CUTNER

THROUGH the kindness of a friend, I have had the opportunity of reading *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* for March, 1964. This is mostly a highly detailed investigation into Trevor Hall's *The Spiritualists*—an inquiry into the mediumship of Florence Cook and her relationship to Sir William Crookes. The *Proceedings*, over 180 pages, has an excellent index, and a chronology which provides very useful information at a glance. The two authors, are Mr. R. G. Medhurst and Mrs. K. M. Goldney, and their object appears to be a kind of "rehabilitation" of Crookes, in which I am obliged to say that, as far as I am concerned they have completely failed. (I do not intend to deal with the problem as to whether he had or had not an "affair" with Florence Cook.)

My own opinion, based on a good deal of hard reading, long before Mr. Hall's book appeared, is that, like so many eminent men and women of the period—about 90 years ago—Crookes was completely bamboozled by a not particularly intelligent girl who saw in this middle-aged scientist an old fool ripe for plucking. When she tried to hoax her own kind, that is, other mediums, she was easily caught in fraud. They knew all the tricks of the trade, and Crookes did not.

But exactly where the authors of the *Proceedings* stand, I have failed to find out. That is, they appear to believe in spiritualistic phenomena when it suits them, and are ready to throw the spirits out when it doesn't.

At the very outset, we are told that "we owe a debt of gratitude" to Mr. Hall's book because he "redirected our attention to the difficult problem of the evidential status of the physical phenomena produced so copiously by the nineteenth century mediums". Well, I have read a good deal about this "phenomena", and long ago found it was brazen fraud. Pretty nearly all the mediums were found out to be frauds, and the only reason for their success was that the believers had no more idea of asking for proof than the average Christian layman. The Victorian who accepted D. D. Home, Florence Cook, Mrs. Guppy, Dr. Slade, Miss Showers, and a host of similar mediums represent exactly the same credulity and ignorance as do the defenders of the Gospel miracles.

We are told in the *Proceedings* that Trevor Hall deserves our thanks because he acquainted us "with some of the more remarkable (and occasionally suspicious) details of Florence Cook's mediumistic career". I am sure that Florence's career was indeed "remarkable" for I doubt if any other medium had ever so thoroughly and successfully duped a noted man of science as she did Crookes. But perhaps not altogether successfully; for there were moments when Crookes had a few teeny-weeny doubts. When he believed everything without question, he was able to describe a seance in the following glowing terms:—

Katie [Katie King who was "materialised" by Florence Cook] never appeared to greater perfection, and for nearly two hours she walked about the room conversing familiarly with those present. On several occasions she took my arm . . . I asked her permission to clasp her in my arms, so as to be able to verify the interesting observations which a bold experimentalist has recently verbosely recorded. Permission was graciously given, and I accordingly did—well, as any gentleman would under the circumstances. (*The Spiritualist*, April 8th, 1874.)

What better proof could Crookes have had than embracing, like a true gentleman, the warm responsive body of a young girl, especially as he was quite sure it was a spirit?

On the other hand, this mood of joyous assurance

must have sadly disappeared later when, in a letter published in *Light* in 1900 (though written in 1874), he said he had found "no satisfactory proof that the dead can return and communicate". Of course, Crookes later insisted without evidence, that his spiritualism was true—and he elicited photography in support. He photographed Florence with and without Katie, and a few of the surviving photographs appear in the *Proceedings*. No doubt for some of them, Florence had a confederate easily spoofing Crookes in the dark. As Podmore in his *Modern Spiritualism* says about the photographs of Florence and Katie, "The likeness between the two sets is unmistakable. Nor is it possible to substantiate any real difference." The reproductions in the *Proceedings* prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the medium and the spirit were one and the same, except when Florence was obliged to have a confederate.

The *Proceedings* should have made a clear and unequivocal declaration whether they considered Crookes to have been duped by Florence Cook and her associates, and whether her materialisations were or were not authentic.

Even D. D. Home told Flammarion (*Mysterious Psychic Forces*, Boston, 1907) that the phenomena of Florence Cook was based "on skilled trickery". Flammarion says:—

The medium Home, employed, as we have seen, in the first experiments of Professor Crookes, gave it to me as his personal opinion that Miss Cook was only a skilful trickster, and had shamefully deceived the eminent scientist; and as for mediums, why there was only one absolutely trustworthy and that was himself, Daniel Dunglas Home!

All the other mediums then existing were "absolutely untrustworthy".

Those who found Trevor Hall's book fascinating, will also find the *Proceedings* almost as fascinating; but unless one is familiar with the history of spiritualism it is in many ways confusing. I think I am right in saying that the verdict on Florence Cook and on Crookes himself is lost in a maze of words on other people.

Without in any way dealing with this case, there is one book which it is a pity has been allowed to go out of print, and which, in my opinion, is perhaps the most devastating exposure of spiritualism ever written. It had long ago been destroyed by Spiritualists in America except for a copy or two, and was reprinted in 1922 by Dr. E. J. Dingwall and Harry Price who made a specially fine job in editing it. I cannot see how it is possible to believe in spirits after one has read *Revelations of a Spirit Medium*. The author has remained anonymous, and unfortunately very few people appear to have heard of his exciting work. Neither Joseph F. Rinn nor Harry Houdini referred to it when, in their time, they demolished so much "genuine" spiritualism.

Finally, if there are any Spiritualists left who believe in materialisations and spirit photography, where are they? Why has no one yet materialised Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge, or even Hannen Swaffer? Surely they would be only too glad to come alive once again to confound the sceptics!

WITHOUT COMMENT

People seem very dubious about what these statements mean, and some people even wonder if they mean anything that really connects with life at all.—Peter Hamilton on *Songs of Praise* (*Radio Times*, 15/4/65).

Easter (2)

By GEORGE R. GOODMAN

If one were to ask a clergyman about the alleged crucifixion of a so-called saviour, he would point to the Bible and would, with a mien that brooked no contradiction, assert that the various accounts in the New Testament were "Gospel truth". So let us for a moment assume that the events described there were really factual. But then, unexpected difficulties immediately arise, if a long series of symbolic "happenings" have to be compressed into actual time.

Mythical depiction requires only hypothetical time, whereas history demands measured duration or clock time. And Jesus must have had a far busier Maundy night than any buzzing American business tycoon or any British Prime Minister on a flying visit to Washington.

All festivals in every religion always have a solar, lunar or stellar basis and all references to so-called historical events or personalities are merely ecclesiastical accretions of a fanciful nature. The Jewish Passover night is always on the 14th of Nisan, which is the first full moon after the vernal equinox—which, in turn, determines the festival of Easter, immaterial whether that is the Christian or pagan Easter.

According to the Jewish Passover ritual, the bone of a lamb has to be on the table and rabbinical explanation is that it is in memory of the Paschal lamb which was slain when the Israelites were in Egypt and whose blood was used to paint the doorposts of their dwellings so that when the final and most decisive of the ten plagues was inflicted upon the Egyptians, namely the slaying of the Egyptian first-born sons, "the angel of the Lord would know where there was an Israelitic family and step over that house and not kill any first-born in it."

After this carnage, the Egyptians told the Israelites to get out as quickly as possible, with the result that they had not time to allow the yeast to raise the flour and they had to take unleavened bread on their journey. Hence, to this day, Jewish people eat *matzos* or unleavened bread for seven days and are not allowed to have ordinary bread or anything that goes through a process of fermentation in the house.

The most interesting thing is that the Roman Catholic Church also adopted the unleavened bread idea, but called it the "host" which, by a mystical process, became the body of Christ and is, of course, very holy. So much so that in Catholic countries, not so very long ago, when the host was carried through the streets, non-Catholics were obliged to fall on their knees, or if indoors, to draw their curtains. Non-compliance with this order invoked severe maltreatment.

The Paschal lamb had originally nothing to do with an animal, but was emblematical of the astrological sign Aries, because at that period the sun stood in the sign of Aries. In short, it was the Age of Aries, preceding the Age of Pisces which was the typical "Christian" Age. This will be more fully explained in a further article.

But let us come back to the "Last Supper" so magnificently portrayed by Leonardo da Vinci as a mural (Milan, 1494-98).

The Jewish Passover feast begins at sundown and the service and reading from a special book at home plus a long ceremonial, eating and singing would bring the time up to about 11 o'clock. Then there was the walk out to Mount of Olives, and return; by that time it would have been past midnight.

Then the switch of scene to Gethsemane and the detailed series of incidents there. Long agony and sweat, chiding of the disciples for falling asleep, arrest by a special guard, cutting off and healing of the ear of the centurion's servant.

What knocks the bottom out of the whole tale are *three separate and distinct court trials*, involving the presence of officials, the procurator, the Sanhedrin, and the masses—all in the late hours of the stillness of an oriental night!

To accept all that as history, is indeed asking us to swallow a camel! The Bible fabricators certainly overreached themselves and their pious fraud was made obvious when the Egyptian hieroglyphics were deciphered and the Babylonian tablets translated.

Unfortunately for the Bible thumpers, it transpired that the story was already 2,000 years old before the alleged events in Judaea—that Egypt had already this dramatic play yearly enacted, portraying the Sungod's disappearance at the autumnal equinox and his return at the vernal equinox.

One little item which the Bible falsifiers never dreamed would be discovered are the "two thieves" that were "crucified" together with the Sungod. Their names were Anup and Aan. (Ask any clergyman whether he can tell you the names of the two thieves!) And why were they punished: Because these wicked fellows were accused of "stealing the light of the Sungod".

Egypt had long known a Jesus, Iusa, who had been born amidst celestial portents of an immaculate parent-hood, circumcised, baptised, tempted, glorified on the mount, persecuted, arrested, tried, condemned, crucified, buried, resurrected and elevated to heaven.

Egypt had listened to a sermon on the mount and the sayings of Iusa for ages. Egypt had known a Jesus who antedated the Gospel Messiah by 2,000 to 5,000 years and presents the investigator with 180 items of identity, similarity and correspondence in word, deed and function with his later copy.

But Egypt's Christ was not a living person. It would have been equally fatal to Christianity if he had been. But the fact of his non-historicity rises now out of the past that priestcraft had thought it had sealed in oblivion for ever, to strike the death-knell of a false and spurious religion.

The Gospels' "life" of Jesus turns out to be nothing but the garbled and fragmentary copy of an Egyptian prototype who never lived, but was a purely typical dramatic figure, portraying the highest degree of ethical excellence. With this revelation of lost truth, the structure of historical Christianity topples to the ground.

But even in that far-from-holy Bible there are three different accounts of Jesus's death. One that he was "crucified" which we have seen was incorrect, for there were already 16 other "Christs" in different nations whose birth, life and death coincided with the one that Christianity espoused. Then there is the account in the Acts that he was "hung on a tree". And lastly, we have the verse in Revelation that Jesus was crucified in Egypt. Does that mean half a crucifixion in Judaea and the other half in Egypt? But then, Christian apologists are not of a critical nature, their main characteristic is credulity.

Assyria and Babylon, Greece and India, China and Mexico, all had their mystical Christs who were connected with sun-worship as will be further explained in a subsequent article.

This Believing World

ONE hundred and seventy years after Paine published his *Age of Reason*, we still find Christians all over the world who believe in the story of Jonah and the whale. Not all Christians of course, for the Rev. G. Byers of St. Mary Magdalene, Bermondsey (*South London Press*, 16/4/65), is one who courageously disbelieves it in the face of the account given to mankind by God in His Precious Word. Even the fact that Jesus was in the tomb for three days just as Jonah was inside the whale for three days is for him no proof that it ever occurred.

★

MR. BYERS found that a "group of pupils at a local school" had already thrown overboard the world-famous story, and were quite surprised to discover he did not believe it either! The class later learnt that "many Biblical stories are not 'Gospel' ". Yet the story of Jonah and other silly stories in the Bible are taught to schoolchildren under the agreed syllabus.

★

OBVIOUSLY, the very greatest film ever made or possible to be made would have to be about Jesus, and cinemagoers will no doubt flock to their millions to see *The Greatest Story Ever Told* on the screen. Yet, in spite of its divine hero, the film has long patches of sheer boredom. One of the painful counts against Heaven as a perpetual home for Christians is the fact that all the Biblical heroes there are *bored*, and not even the most enthusiastic Christian would be able to stand more than a week or so of them.

★

THOSE WHO "like the Good Word served up with the flourish of Barnum and Bailey, and the celestial saccharin of Cecil B. de Mille, will flock to this epic in their multitudes" said David Zec, in the *Daily Mirror* (8/4/65) but "it is a movie aimed at cash customers not converts". In fact, Mr. Zec frankly confessed that "sermons in Cinerama, stereophonic angels, the lacquered hair styles, and the heavenly Hallelulahs, move me not at all". And he was glad we were spared a shot of Jesus "walking on water"—surely the most marvellous miracle in the history of miracles! But Mr. Zec is far more contemptuous than these quotations show.

★

WE USED to be referred to the huge number of Christians in the world as proof of its terrific influence, and now the Bishop of Guildford tells us that "Christianity is a minority religion". This after nearly 1900 years of the Bible and Jesus, literally forced on us by law. Dr. Rein-dorp will have to invent better excuses for the failure of Christianity than he does in the *Sunday Mirror* (18/4/65). What about the deadliest attack on his religion of all—that it is not true?

★

ACCORDING to the *Daily Mail* (17/4/65) there is going to be tough opposition by Roman Catholics at the Council of Europe in May, to "a British proposal to promote family planning on a world scale." So far, the "anti-birth control countries have lost the first round", but religious feeling in Roman Catholic countries is still hotly opposed to reducing the birth rate in underdeveloped countries.

★

GERDA L. COHEN, writing on religion in English schools (*New Statesman*, 23/4/65) reported that in one London borough alone, there were 600 vacancies in county primary schools scattered over a wide area. If the local education authority succumbed to "clerical apologetics" and built a Roman Catholic school, vacancies would go up to 880. "The archdiocese concerned, while frankly acknowledging

this, contend that Catholic parents are also ratepayers entitled to their legal rights". Our "hotch-potch" system has, as Mrs. Cohen said, "been the making of Roman Catholic education". But she thought it "could well be the breaking of it". For, while the "pagan taxpayer" might have "no strong aversion to shoring up the poor old C of E, he might conceivably object to financing popish propaganda". We hope Mrs. Cohen hasn't underestimated the apathy of our "pagan taxpayer".

★

FINALLY, good news for Roman Catholics from an American archdiocese—that of Chicago. The faithful have, we learn from the *Guardian* (22/4/65) been granted dispensation to eat meat on Fridays if they are travelling on trains in the United States.

Philosophy of Science—Some Facets

7—FINAL CAUSE

By DOUGLAS BRAMWELL

THE factor contributing most to the progress of science since the Renaissance has been the elimination of any consideration of "final cause" from scientific work. In other words, the working scientist assumes that present events are fully determined by past events and that no consideration of future events or "purposes" is necessary.

Whether or not this rigid exclusion of any reference to future purposes will be as successful in the now developing biological sciences as it has been for physics remains to be seen. At present it is in the philosophy of science, as it expands into metaphysics, that the lack of reference to final causes is apparent.

The meaning of "final causes" must at this stage, be made clear. What is not meant—what would indeed be nonsense—is that some future event not yet existing can influence the world here and now. All that "final cause" can be allowed to mean is that human beings and other organisms have the ability consciously or unconsciously, to control the physical activity of their bodies in anticipation of some state of affairs which they are striving to bring about.

Because it is not interested in final causes science can enumerate all the co-ordinated forces that cause our trains to run but at the same time, can ignore the co-ordinating factor—the men with their eyes on the timetables.

The metaphysical philosopher cannot ignore final causes in this way: they are so integral a part of biological activity that they must be included in any adequate general view of the world.

An interesting problem then arises. At what stage in the evolution of matter do final causes begin to operate? In his philosophical system A. N. Whitehead outflanks the problem by allowing all matter—even elementary particles—some degree of final causation.

This approach has been criticised because the degree of self regulation in a particle must be so rudimentary as to be unverifiable.

But perhaps Occam's Razor can be brought to Whitehead's defence. The material of which we have the most intimate knowledge—the material in our bodies—is certainly linked to subjective decisions about the future. The physicist's inert matter—matter with no subjective aspect—is a different class of entity; a class of which we have no direct knowledge.

Unless such an entity leads to a great simplification of theory, Occam would certainly disapprove. Such a simplification is far from being proved.

THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

Telephone: HOP 2717

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year £1 17s. 6d.; half-year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d.

In USA and Canada: One year, \$5.25; half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. J. W. BARKER, L. EBURY, J. A. MILLAR and C. E. WOOD.

(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday Evenings.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead)—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, May 9th, 11 a.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, "Asia in Revolt".

Surbiton and Malden & Coombe and Kingston Branches NSS The White Hart, Kingston Bridge, Hampton Wick), Friday, May 7th, 8 p.m.: A Meeting.

Notes and News

THE Israeli newspaper, *Maariv* has described Pope Paul as a "faithful heir to his teacher, Pope Pius XII, who did not lift a finger to save the Jews during the Second World War", and as a spokesman for the "Curia-Conservative reactionary circles in control at the Vatican". But Vatican officials are "expressing surprise and regret" (according to the *Catholic Herald*, 16/4/65) that the Pope's now notorious Passion Sunday sermon should have been "misunderstood" and "misrepresented". He did no more, they argue, than "use the traditional Gospel story of the rejection of Christ by the people of his time, as an example of what is going on among peoples everywhere in the world today". What the Pope said was: "Just at the right moment a people predestined to await the Messiah not only did not recognise Him, but fought Him abused Him and finally killed Him". That is indeed, the "traditional" Gospel story and it is hard to see, in the light of it, how there can be any real reconciliation between the Christians and the Jews.

★

NOR is it easy to imagine any satisfactory "bridge" between Rome and atheism, such as the Secretariat for Relations with Non-believers envisages. "Peace through dialogue." Cardinal Koenig's declared aim, may sound very commendable, but what peace can there be when each believes the other to be a danger to mankind? The Church, the Cardinal has said (*Catholic Herald*, 16/4/65), "does not wish to organise a fight against atheism, but rather to uncover all possible ways of safeguarding the religious

life in a modern world". These are, we suggest, the words of one who bargains from weakness. "We have nothing against the peoples living under materialist regimes," Cardinal Koenig once said, ". . . for even materialists are our brothers who have fallen into error . . . whom we love and for whom we pray in the hope that one day their eyes might be opened."

★

RECENT surveys on bigotry in England and America—we learn from the same issue of the *Catholic Herald*—show that religious people tend to be less humanitarian, tolerant or at peace with themselves than non-religious. Dr. Milton Rokeach, Professor of Psychology at Michigan State University cited British and American sociological and psychological studies to show that: churchgoers had more punitive attitudes towards criminals, delinquents, prostitutes, homosexuals and psychiatric cases than had non-believers; they expressed more intolerance towards other racial and ethnic groups.

★

THE authoritarian nature of Catholicism was stressed in an Easter sermon by the new Florentine Cardinal, Archbishop Florit. "Obedience to authority is a moral obligation," he said (*The Guardian*, 22/4/65). Obedience to what was taught and commanded by the "Sacred Hierarchy" was a condition for "being faithful to Christ's religion and for participating in all that God has done for the salvation of man."

★

DR. HENRY MORGANTALER, President of the Quebec Committee for Neutral Schools, has announced that his English-speaking group will work in "cordial but unofficial co-operation" with Le Mouvement Laic de Langue Française, established four years ago to promote non-confessional French schools in the province (*The Montreal Star*, 14/4/65). There is, however, a difference in attitude between the two groups. The French organisation would be content with a neutral system set up alongside the existing Roman Catholic system, whereas the English committee wants a single, neutral, English educational system.

★

A YOUNG Anglican chaplain at McGill University, the Rev. Paul Gibson, told the Committee for Neutral Schools that agnostics or non-Protestants were at present excluded from teaching in Quebec's Protestant schools unless they resorted to the "hypocrisy and dishonesty" of swearing that they belonged to a Protestant denomination.

★

INDEPENDENT TELEVISION is to be congratulated on allowing a straightforward half-hour's "confrontation" between an Atheist and a Christian in *Sunday Break* on April 25th. David Tribe, President of the National Secular Society, and Methodist Dr. Donald Soper argued seriously about Easter, without any chairman and without any loss of temper. Of course they sometimes interrupted or spoke together, but this happens in chaired discussions too. And each was determined enough to hold the floor long enough to make his point. Certainly nobody could complain of dullness.

★

OUR only complaint, in fact, is against Dr. Soper's occasional recourse (when cornered?) to superciliousness: dubbing an argument "adolescent", for instance, or advising Mr. Tribe to reread the New Testament. Silliest of all was the "That's-nineteenth-century-materialism" retort when Mr. Tribe insisted that we have no experience of "personalities" detached from bodies. But, we repeat, a worthwhile discussion—the first, we hope, of many.

Points from New Books

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

VICTOR NEUBURG felt that to believe in God was to believe in a Supreme Tyrant, although he found, when he was seduced by "The Great Beast", that "he had no objection against hierarchies of Masters and Gods evolved from within the universe." Jean Overton Fuller, his biographer, writes, in *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg* (W. H. Allen, 42s.): "I remember Vicky's saying once . . . that it was 'while wallking down a dusty road in South London' that he saw in the window of a shop 'a little paper that changed my entire life.' I thought he was going to say something occult, but his next words were 'THE FREETHINKER'."

Miss Fuller surveys the contributions which Neuburg made to this journal. His first was to the issue of October 25th, 1903, and it was a poem entitled:

Vale Jehovah!

What if to the Race I was born?
To me that's no reason why I
Should cling to a faith that I scorn,
When my birthright's the infinite sky!

Thy yoke I for ever throw over!

Encouraged, Neuburg also began to contribute poems to *The Agnostic Review*, and indeed he might have become the editor of this paper had he not met Aleister Crowley.

Yet even after Crowley had cast his spell, THE FREETHINKER played an important role in Neuburg's life. It was because Hayter Preston was a contributor to the journal that G. W. Foote introduced him to Neuburg; and this meeting encouraged Preston, when he became literary editor of the *Sunday Referee*, to offer Vicky a feature called *Poets' Corner*, a feature which helped so many to establish themselves, from Dylan Thomas to Miss Fuller herself. So the biography is sprinkled with references to THE FREETHINKER's associates and contributors—H. Cutner, Bayard Simmons, etc. Then I remember Neuburg telling me, during his last illness, that he was occupying himself by correcting proofs for THE FREETHINKER. And Miss Fuller writes: "Probably the last person from outside to see him [Neuburg] was Mr. Cutner from THE FREETHINKER, in 1940 when he took the photograph of him in bed, the head propped up against the pillow. A beard had grown on his face because he could not shave."

But in the years between Neuburg's first contribution to THE FREETHINKER and his last services to the paper, the highlights belonged to "The Great Beast". Miss Fuller gives a riveting account of the ritual sex which Crowley and Neuburg practised as magic in Paris, and it is probably "one of the strangest religious exercises in history". She describes too how the lovers walked together in the African desert and called up spirits, and how they "opened the Temple" on the shores of Loch Ness. When one reads these amazing records, one cannot help feeling that the participants could scarcely have escaped "visions". They drove themselves to delirium through various exhaustions; and in the end apparitions were no more inexplicable than the ghost who can be attributed to "it must have been something I ate".

One can appreciate too, only too clearly, how magic can be used as an escape into illusionary self-importance. Crowley himself probably turned to magic because he was ashamed of the fact that the family fortune came from beer and that, in the language of his time, he was "not a gentleman". Neuburg took what he thought was

a short cut to inspirational fires; and when he left "The Great Beast" and was cursed, he was cut down to size, to an appealing little bird man who printed books of his own rhapsodic verses and later offered tea and cakes and conversation to young poets in a conservatory. It was magic which brought outrageous pretension to Neuburg's life; and it was magic which brought the inevitable retribution—the pay-off of pathos when the magic promise fails to be more than kinky make-believe. When I met Crowley, he was already beginning to pay that penalty as a poor old man who could no longer afford any temptation to the flesh or the world.

But Miss Fuller's book re-emphasises the lesson that anyone who claims to be a Master and hints at forbidden mysteries can for a time attract disciples. When Miss Fuller pointed out to one of Crowley's disciples that it was rather disgraceful that the climax of "The Paris Working" should have been a petition to the gods for money, she was solemnly assured that The Master had only mentioned money "to use up any surfeit of power brought down". People, one realises, are so anxious to believe, to see themselves, through the cult, in grander terms, that they will struggle violently to justify any imposture; and we must indeed be grateful to Miss Fuller for giving us a book which is a magnificent exposé of wishful thinking. ("It has taken 100,000,000 years to produce Aleister Crowley", one disciple exclaimed piously!)

Maybe some readers will find Book One, "Vicky As I Knew Him", a little bathetic; but surely everyone will be enthralled by Book Two, "Vicky's Story". Apart from everything else, there is a very credible tale which reveals how Jack the Ripper was murdered! And how delightful it is to learn that Crowley made beginner's errors when drawing up his portentous horoscopes! Finally, Miss Fuller asks the jackpot question: If Neuburg had not met Crowley, if he had remained faithful to rational freethinking, might he not have developed to find a secure place for himself as a minor poet rather than transient notoriety as "the man Crowley turned into a goat"; might he not have escaped the years of tragedy, the magic pay-off?

In *The Wine Of Violence* (Cape, 21s.), Neil S. Boardman shows how mean a small Bible-loving community in Minnesota can be. No wonder that one of the characters is driven to revolt and say that the Scriptures are gibberish. "The Bible is a great work of literature, mainly because it was translated in a poetic age, the age of Shakespeare. But it's not scientific. In your quotation (from the Bible) a mysterious word is explained by other words that are just as mysterious. It's like the definition of God they teach you in the catechism. 'God is a spirit'. But as we don't know what a spirit is, we're no better off than before . . . An educated person can hardly believe in God. 'The fear of God's a hangman's whip to keep the wretch in order'."

Obi B. Egbuna is adroitly witty in his novel, *Wind Versus Polygamy* (Faber, 16s.), and the story is a well argued ethical case for many wives. In one scene Chief Ozuomba talks to a Catholic priest about polytheism. The chief says: "We have many gods. We don't call you pagan. You have only one god. You call us Pagan. Does it ever occur to you that you are only one god away from paganism?" But this is definitely a book you must read as it is full of cunning suspense as well as humour and intriguing polemics.

Design and Accident

By R. MITCHELL

WHEN derogating and dismissing an argument as absurd it is important that the reasons against it shall be weighty and relevant.

To all of us who are convinced that the argument from Design as proof of the existence and power of a Creator is invalid it was cheering to have F. A. Ridley standing shoulder to shoulder with us as he penned his article, printed in the March 19th issue of this journal, against theologians and their kin who continue to hold to the argument as reasonable. The present writer, however, was disturbed to see so valiant an opposition vitiated in its effect by its use of the space age as providing empirical knowledge against which the theologians would have to make a long needed retreat. It was like seeing a giant being hit with a match stick.

Does not our experience of theologians direct us rather to know that they will swallow up the empirical into the customary, conservative, and tenacious a priori origination of their reasoning? Now that they have decided from sheer need of survival to accommodate their apologetics to the findings of modern science they will use them with familiar adroitness as extra data to support their deductions. It will make little difference to them if knowledge is extended and new concepts call for a change in terminology. Whatever the mathematical-chemical-electronic-radioactive-energy system-inhering, interbalancing, interactive whatever-else-the-dynamic-cum-substantiality—or nonsubstantiality of things may be, and whatever is hinted of from this edge of the far impenetrables of space that by an Einstein's thinking we are asked not to conceive as spatial at all, the first a priori preoccupation of the theists will be unshaken. We shall see them wading neck deep in the rising tide of knowledge while they declare: "See! Look upon the pattern of the waves and the coherence of the whole, probe into every constituent of this flood, and find herein proof beyond all disputing that a Supreme Being made and controls it all." What coherence or design in it all there will be when the waters go over their heads and ours neither they nor we shall be in a condition to say.

There is one fact that we must accept as absolute and that is that the flood, here representing the multiple individuality and the one comprehensive totality of things, is already over our heads and we humans swallowed up in its depths. It is a welter of opposites. There is design in it, and there is chaos; there is coherence and there is conflict; there is direction and there is aimlessness; purpose and waste; plan and accident; purpose and absurdity; the rational and the irrational. However much we know of the nature of things, perhaps even the more we know, the whole presents itself to us as the rebus of a madman.

When a theologian's child sickens by the penetration of a parasitic virus, twists and cries throughout a prolonged torture, and finally dies in a last spasm of pain, will he then have reason to postulate Design as proving God's existence? This kind of phenomenon with much else in the way things are and work is integral with the enigma of existence. That Something Is Going On, that includes the universe and our own tiny planet, is clearly apparent, but philosophy, theology, and metaphysics go beyond their reach and capacity when they state by any argument that there is a Supreme Someone doing it all. This cannot be known. To argue from Design is to presume that the Design is known. Of course it isn't. We have no final knowledge of the Design of a midge or its place in the

million million things living or conglomerates of energised nuclei. How then can we talk of the Design of the whole?

And not knowing whether or not there is Design how can we deduce a Designer?

We cannot stop ourselves guessing, or gambling thought on a partial interpretation of things, projecting our minds imaginatively as it were from one tiny piece of a jigsaw towards what the whole picture may be. But to be egotistically assertive, to be dogmatic, to state categorically on the basis of Design or any other deduction that God is, that He is such and such, that He commands our obeisance to this and to that, or that a particular group of men are the repositories of this final and absolute knowledge, is an arrogance deserving the utmost intellectual contempt.

But equally none of us is in a position to state that the solar system or any other things exist or function accidentally, as F. A. Ridley fell into the error of saying, even though he was careful to say it in reference to the non-production of life. A negative posits knowledge in the same plane as a positive, but in this plane there is no knowledge, only speculation. Metaphysical speculation is fascinating, like mastering new juggling acts, but the abstractions that are thrown up and down and to and fro are merely stage acts demonstrating nothing more than mental agility. They are irrelevant to fact, irrelevant to the "what is" of things, and as for the dark around us that we call the mystery of things only a tiny glimmer of light reaches us that may or may not be relevant to ultimate truth, if indeed in the volatility of the universe truth ever can be ultimate.

Free, honest, and intelligent thinking requires no satisfaction in ultimates or in a priori and abstract deductions. There is so much to find out empirically that admission in humility of our intellectual incapacity to comprehend ultimates is but one more acceptance of what is true. Maybe the Something Going On knows what it's up to; maybe the Going On is its own significance; maybe we little humans are its coming into consciousness of itself; maybe it has an entity in its whole content; maybe, maybe, maybe anything; and maybe we haven't begun to find the right answers because we haven't started to ask the right questions. The one maybe not least among other questionable maybes is that an Architect called God, standing outside everything that is—wherever such an "outside" could possibly be—is "proved" to exist by the evidence of a design of things, when we know next to nothing about the things and nothing at all as to whether there is a design.

As H. G. Wells observed, the greater the circle of our knowledge the wider the circumference of our ignorance. And who shall claim to know what impinges upon the surface of that ever increasing circumference?

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CORRESPONDENCE

TROTSKY'S MURDER

In my recently conferred capacity of a "master of subterfuge and confusion", I feel inclined to comment on Trotsky's murder mentioned in Mr. R. Smith's letter (16/4/65).

I must remark in the first place that I do not see that this probably political assassination has any particular relevance to my recent article, "The Ethics of Assassination"; indeed if Mr. Smith goes on in this strain, I shall probably follow up that article with one on, "The Ethics of Confusion". My article was a short one, I had only the space for a few leading cases and, the murder of Trotsky, spectacular as it was, had no particular political importance, for there does not seem any likelihood that had the "Red War Lord" survived the war—he died in August 1940—he would still have played any notable revolutionary role during the post-war years.

With regard to the dramatic murder of Trotsky in Mexico City, there are two contradictory theories: (a) the Trotsky one (related to me personally by Pierre Frank, one of Trotsky's bodyguards in Mexico) that Trotsky was killed by an agent of Stalin, and (b) the Stalinist theory that Trotsky was killed by one of his disgruntled followers.

Whichever of these rival explanations may be true, I repeat that I do not think that this admittedly barbarous murder can be said to have altered the course of history in any significant way—which was all that I was concerned with in my article.

Re Mr. Smith's concluding innuendo that because L. D. Trotsky, the most brilliant Marxist of his day, may have been killed by a rival Marxist, this discredits Marxism itself: such an allegation certainly dubs Mr. Smith as "a master of subterfuge and confusion". For it is actually on the same "intellectual" level as the Christian claim that if, say, an Atheist runs off with someone else's wife, this proves that atheism is *ipso facto* "immoral!"

Let us stick to logic and thus avoid such irrelevant personalities.

F. A. RIDLEY.

A REPLY TO MY CRITICS

Mr. D. M. Chapman (THE FREETHINKER, 23/4/65) is wrong in claiming that pain fits in quite understandably with a rationalist view of the world. It would indeed be of little consolation to a man dying of cancer to hear from a rationalist that his dreadful disease was due to natural causes rather than to sin. In short the problem of pain is as much a problem for the rationalist as it is for the Christian.

A pessimist has no need to be dogmatic in regard to the human failures to alleviate suffering from the world. On the contrary, dogmatism usually springs from an optimistic source.

Mrs. Kit Mouat is on her high-horse at me, but I am not impressed with what she says. She would like to be a bit of a dictator, and not allow anyone to express the tragic side of life if she had her way. Here is optimistic dogmatism with a vengeance, and resentment to the deep sufferings of man. Death and suffering are not interesting so let us dismiss them, or treat them lightly. That's Mrs. Mouat's so-called philosophy in a nutshell. It is the very antithesis of all true philosophy. Escapism and nothing else.

R. SMITH.

THE TRIAL OF JESUS

Having published in your columns at some length Paul Winter's "Trial of Jesus", will you please also publish the pertinent pages from Ory's *Analysis of Christian Origins*, (27 et seq.) Marc Stephane published his book on the same subject about the same time as Mr. Winter's book appeared, and I asked him, if we could find an English publisher for a translation of his work, to include in the English edition (which never eventuated) a study of Winter's book; and he was quite prepared to do so. I should recommend to your readers who read French to study the works of Stephane and of Guy Fau, both fairly recent publications which were noticed in THE FREETHINKER when they appeared. They will find these works in the National Secular Society library.

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

[It was our intention to allow space—as we have frequently done in the past—for presentation of the mythicist case. Hence George R. Goodman's articles. However, we thank Mr. Bonner for his suggestion, and we hope soon to print M. Ory's relevant pages—E.D.]

SPAIN

With regard to the exiled National Confederation of Labour of Spain, I would like to suggest a few reasons for not lending our financial support to these people; for while we sympathise

strongly with them in their efforts to create a brighter future for their strife-torn land, we must recognise that responsibility for the state of affairs in Spain, now or at any other time, past or future, rests wholly with the Spanish. Provided there is no foreign interference (military, economic or financial), a people will get the government it deserves, and since the Spanish NCL currently dislike their government, it is up to them to do something about it, without relying upon goodwill gifts of one sort or another.

Recently, the appeal says, a large number of people have been thrown into jail. If we help to get them out, have we any assurance that they will not repeat their disastrous mistakes, and go back into jail? Rowdy demonstrations of this kind, in present-day conditions are surely more akin to foolishness than heroism.

Instead of relying on the British to foot the bill for this kind of incompetence in Catalonia, I admonish the Spanish NCL to improve its tactics in voicing protests. If they have the will to win a better future for their people, they will do so: when they have received the popular support they at present lack, they will surely take power. With this kind of success, we can be friends and gladly lend economic assistance where possible. Currently, however, there is only suicidal failure, and as failure is everybody's enemy, we must not assist it lest it repeats itself, ultimately at even greater cost to the National Confederation of Labour in Spain.

ERIC S. BARKER.

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